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ABSTRACT

This report explores effects of a year-round schedule on pupil and teacher attendance in the Jefferson County, Colorado, School District. Information is drawn from a 1977 district study and from interviews with teachers and principals. Comparison of data on attendance before the program and after its first year found that attendance increased in elementary and secondary schools. Teachers' attendance improved as well, demonstrated by less sick and personal leave. Over a year, per pupil cost savings was 74 cents. An unanticipated result (of the year-round school experience) was reduction of high school dropout statistics. Students returned to school (at no cost to the student) during a fifth quarter vacation in larger numbers: 2,010 additional spaces were utilized and additional credits totaled 1,171. Similar gains occurred among junior high schools. Elementary students often chose short courses offered during vacations. Interviews with experienced administrators and teachers include the following observations: Scheduling flexibility accommodated students arriving and departing at each term change and desiring to change teachers. Dropout problems were similarly resolved. Teachers preferred the adaptable lifestyle; families with both parents employed could arrange vacations. School holding power increased during the standard academic year. The schedule proved to be a feasible means for extending the year for able students and for those needing additional education, without incurring drastic budget increases. (CJH)

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EFFECTS OF THE YEAR-ROUND CALENDAR ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Speech to the 18th Annual Meeting of

the National Council on Year-Round Education

Anaheim, California
February 2, 1987

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EFFECTS OF THE YEAR-ROUND CALENDAR ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

by William D. White ED.D.

Variety, it is said, is the spice of life. School attendance schedules and their effect on pupil attendance are no exception. Experience with year-round schedules suggest that variety in vacation times offered pupils provides incentives that increase the amount of school attendance in general. Moreover, there appears to be some connection between pupil attendance, student drop out rates, teacher absenteeism and the variation in attendance patterns offered in year-round schools.

Some school systems have been gaining experience with year-round calendars for more than ten years and outcomes have led to some interesting conclusions by teachers and administrators who have worked with them. In schools operating on the year-round plan students and teachers come to school on various patterns of attendance which offer more than one extended vacation per year and which schedule the pupils' presence in school for more attendance terms of shorter duration. Most plans offer two, three or four vacations along with national holidays and pupils attend from two to five terms of instruction. Although the basic purpose of these plans has been to increase the rated capacity of school buildings and thereby create large savings in construction costs, there have been some side effects which school principals have seen as highly beneficial.

Ten years ago the Jefferson County Colorado School District completed a study of the effects of the year-round schedule on pupil and teacher attendance. This was one of the largest

year-round operations in the nation at that time with both elementary and secondary schools involved. When comparison data was collected on school attendance before the year-round program began and then compared with pupil attendance after the first year of the new calendar, the percentage of attendance improved at both the elementary and high school levels. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 YEAR ROUND SCHOOL COMPARISON OF ATTENDANCE

BASE YEAR VERSUS FIRST PILOT YEAR

Category	Base year			Pilot year		
	ADM	ADA	Attendance%	ADM	ADA	Attendance%
Elementary	6,996	6,779	96.0	6,859	6,664	97.0
Junior High	3,222	3,095	96.0	3,341	3,222	96.0
Senior High	3,137	2,966	94.5	3,700	3,547	95.0

Not only did students attend better but teachers attended better as well. When the cost savings per pupil was computed on all the benefits noted in the year-round school experience it was observed that teachers took less sick leave than they had before. This reduction in sick and personal leave costs over a year's time was computed at a cost savings of 74 cents per pupil.

An unexpected effect of the year-round school experience was the influence it had on the district's high school dropout statistics. Comparative data was kept on the number of high school dropouts before students went on the year round calendar and after a full year of experience with the new plan. Where the

percent of high school students who had dropped out of school was 5 percent of the official enrollment before year-round scheduling it was reduced to only 2 percent of official enrollment in the same schools after the new plan went into effect.

Not only did student attendance hold up in the minimum school year, but they began to come back to school during vacations in larger numbers. The year-round schedule offered in Jefferson County permitted students to return, with the principal's permission, for a fifth quarter during one of their vacation terms at no cost to the student. Data was maintained on fifth quareter attendance for both enrichment and remedial purposes. The attendance of one student in one course for the duration of a quarter of the year was credited as one student space utilized. In two senior high schools on the year-round calendar 2,010 additional student spaces were utilized during fifth quarters. Of these 1,056 were used for enrichment purposes and 954 for remedial purposes. Additional credits awarded totaled 1,171 in the two schools on year-round schedules. (See figure 2). Similar gains were achieved in junior high schools as well.

Figure 2 YEAR ROUND SCHOOLS FIFTH QUARTER UTILIZATION

SCHOOL LEVEL	SPACES USED	ENRICHMENT	REMEDIAL	CREDIT	NONCREDIT
Elementary	504	251	250	NA	NA
Junior High	393	213	180	250	143
Senior High	2,010	1,056	954	1,171	839

In addition to the fifth quarter offerings the year-round schools were able to present short courses to students during their vacations which were called Bonus Learning Activities. Elementary school pupils used these opportunities most. In eleven elementary schools 8,218 children enrolled in these activities for enrichment purposes and 2,218 for remedial purposes. See Figure 3.

Figure 3 YEAR ROUND SCHOOL BONUS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

SCHOOL LEVEL	COURSES	ENROLLED	ENRICHMENT	REMEDIAL	AVG.HRS.LENGTH
Elementary	885	11,297	8,218	2,218	5.05 hrs.
Junior High	149	1,878	1,740	264	9.85 hrs.
Senior High	103	1,343	1,106	133	30.90 hrs.

After twelve years of experience with year-round education there were a number of administrators and teachers who had observed the effects of the program over the years. Some of these veterans were interviewed to obtain their views on key questions. Why did these benefits occur in year-round schools? Do they continue to happen after years of continued experience? Several of these persons who had the experience of operating on both nine month and year-round calendars had some very practical reasons for the positive outcomes.

A high school principal said it's easy to see why attendance in the year-round plan was better. There is much more flexibility in scheduling with new groups of students arriving and leaving at each term change. One of the things that makes high school students miss class is difficulty with a course or teacher.

Since students are rescheduled each quarter those who are having difficulty know they can stick it out under a teacher where they have a problem until the end of the quarter, then, change to a new class being formed for students returning from vacation.

Dropout problems are resolved in much the same way. Difficulties in a high school student's life which seem serious enough to cause one to quit school in August often look far different in October. An individual student can miss the first term and, after their personal lives are better arranged, come back to join a new class the second term. Discipline problems are often resolved by this kind of flexibility. Principals in year-round schools say they can maintain good discipline in a more relaxed atmosphere. If you can't solve a difficult situation right now you can do it next term.

Year round schools allow teachers and principals many more opportunities to give students a second chance. It takes a more flexible teacher to enjoy this kind of operation and principals say you must have a "Buy-in" from the whole staff to make it work. One administrator said it is not the calendar, in fact, that affects school attendance. Rather, the fact that the school operates 252 days a year makes it possible to develop the characteristics of an outstanding school which does attract students. A year-round school with more academic terms in a calendar year allows a large amount of discretion on the part of a principal who must administer to a great variety of student needs. Instruction is more intense while the student is in attendance and in secondary schools they have an option to extend their school year with more courses of individual choice. The year-round

calendar has made 225 days of instruction a possibility for those who want and need the additional schooling.

Teachers generally seem to like year-round schedules better. When a survey was taken of all the teachers in three K-12 feeder systems to see how they felt about going back to a 9 month calendar 90% voted against it. When principals from these schools were asked why teachers have this preference they responded that the multiple vacations of a year-round calendar suits the life-style of teachers better. It permits them time to pursue a variety of interests and come back after each vacation rested and ready for a fresh start.

It is the opinion of veteran principals who have managed both traditional and year-round schools that pupil attendance and behavior will not be adversely affected by the extended year calendar in schools which undertake the change. An exception to this will occur, however, when holidays and activities which have become traditional in the community are not provided for in the year round schools. Absenteeism due to illness can occur any time of year. Absence caused by harsh weather is exclusively a winter occurrence. An elementary principal said that the calendar does not influence the parents' decision to take their children out of school for recreational purposes. In the new life style with both parents working there are some who will take their children on a vacation at any time of year. Since winter vacations have become more popular some children are out with parents repeatedly during the skiing and hunting seasons.

Some schools which have been on the year-round calendar with multiple tracks of students have reverted to a single track

because of a drop in enrollment. They adopt a track considered most desirable by the majority and then release all students at the same time. Principals interviewed concerning the rate of pupil absenteeism now on the single track said there was no observable difference. High school administrators said it cut down on the availability of vacation jobs and one principal reported increased vandalism at the local shopping center now that more students were out at the same time. Although the benefits in rate of attendance gained from the multiple track year-round calendar were maintained on the single track plan a greater benefit was sacrificed with the elimination of the fifth quarter option for educational enrichment and remediation.

The year-round school schedule has, in the opinion of experienced administrators and teachers, shown a tendency for increasing the holding power of schools during the standard academic year. At the same time it has proven to be a feasible means for extending the length of the academic year for able and ambitious students who take advantage of options to enroll in classes beyond their minimum attendance track. It seems to be a feasible way for introducing a 225 day school year for those who need additional education without drastic increases in school district budgets.